

Message Text

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H-02 INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01

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OMB-01 RSR-01 IO-12 /132 W
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P 161841 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9761

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: ELAB, UK

SUBJECT: LABOR UNREST IN BRITAIN: MARCH 11-16

REF: LONDON' S 2843

1. SUMMARY: DURING THE WEEK MARCH 11 THROUGH 16 PROTEST STRIKES, SLOWDOWNS AND " NON- COOPERATION" BY THOUSANDS OF RAILWAYMEN, GAS WORKERS, HOSPITAL ANCILLARY EMPLOYEES AND CIVIL SERVANTS CONTINUED TO HARASS AND INCONVENIENCE LARGE PORTIONS OF THE POPULATION AND DAMAGE INDUSTRY. GAS WORKERS WERE BEING BALLOTTED BY THEIR UNIONS ON MANAGEMENT' S LATEST OFFER (REFTEL) AND MARCH 16 THE BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD WAS MEETING WITH THE THREE RAIL UNIONS IN ANOTHER PEACE EFFORT. IN THE STALEMATED MINERS' PAY CASE, THE UNION DECIDED MARCH 16 TO TAKE A STRIKE BALLOT. TUC GENSEC VICTOR FEATHER WARNED THAT THE GOVERNMENT' S ATTITUDE ON THE CURRENT DISPUTES WOULD " LEAD TO MORE TROUBLE IN THE FUTURE." MEANWHILE, THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL HAS BEEN UNABLE TO AGREE ON THE DATE AND KIND OF PROTEST ACTION VOTED BY THE RECENT SPECIAL CONGRESS (LONDON' S 2641). THE STRIKES
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AND PROTESTS ARE OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S PHASE TWO COUNTER- INFLATION POLICIES ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT SHOWS NO SIGN OF WEAKENING. END SUMMARY.

2. RAILS - AGAINST THE CONTINUING BACKGROUND OF COMMUTER AND LONG DISTANCE TRANSPORTATION CHAOS AND CONSEQUENT TRAFFIC JAMS, BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD WAS MEETING LATE MARCH 16 WITH RAIL UNIONS IN AN EFFORT TO BREAK THE DEADLOCK IN THE LOCOMOTIVE DRIVERS' PAY DISPUTE. THE DRIVERS' UNION(ASLEF) HAS SET NEW 24- HOUR STOPPAGES FOR MARCH 18 (SUNDAY) AND MARCH 22. MEANWHILE, THE UNION'S " NON- COOPERATION" AND OVERTIME BAN POLICIES CONTINUED ALL WEEK TO DISRUPT COMMUTER TRAFFIC CAUSING ENORMOUS INCONVENIENCE TO THE PUBLIC, PARTICULARLY IN LONDON. ASLEF'S TACTICS HAVE CAUSED BITTERLY STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN IT AND NUR (TRAINMEN, PORTERS, SIGNALMEN, ETC.) AND TSSA (CLERKS) BECAUSE OF THE RESULTING DELAY IN GETTING GENERAL PAY TALKS STARTED AND LOST PAY DUE TO THE STRIKES. ASLEF IS SEEKING A " RESTRUCTURING" OF PAY SCALES WHICH IF GRANTED WOULD PIERCE GOVERNMENT PAY LIMITS AND STILL NOT AFFECT WAGES FOR A MAJORITY OF RAILMEN. MANAGEMENT'S CANCELLATION OF MILEAGE BONUS PAYMENTS TO ENGINE DRIVERS (BECAUSE OF THE SLOWDOWNS) HAS HARDENED ASLEF'S POSITION.

3. GAS - AS THE GAS WORKERS' INDUSTRIAL ACTION CONTINUED, AROUND 20,000 WORKERS IN INDUSTRY WERE OFF THEIR JOBS AS A RESULT. THE NUMBER OF CONSUMERS EXPERIENCING REDUCED PRESSURE REMAINED AT SOMETHING OVER FOUR MILLION, WITH 3,268 BUSINESSES AND 1,678 SCHOOLS COMPLETELY WITHOUT SUPPLIES. IN THE WEST MIDLANDS WHERE 50,000 HOUSEHOLDS WERE CUT OFF CONSUMERS WERE BEGINNING MARCH 15 TO RECEIVE GAS SUPPLIES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TWO WEEKS. MEANWHILE, THE GAS WORKERS' UNIONS (GMWU AND TGWU) ARE CONDUCTING A RANK AND FILE BALLOT ON THE GAS CORPORATION'S LATEST OFFER WHICH WOULD PROVIDE CERTAIN FRINGE BENEFITS MAINLY IN THE PENSION AREA. RESULTS OF THE BALLOT ARE EXPECTED AROUND MARCH 23. BECAUSE OF THIS LATEST OFFER, THE UNIONS POSTPONED PLANS TO INTENSIFY THEIR ACTION AND IN SOME INSTANCES HAVE BEEN PROVIDING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NEAR NORMAL PRODUCTION AND SERVICE.

4. HOSPITALS - HUNDREDS OF HOSPITALS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY HAVE CONTINUED TO BE SEVERELY AFFECTED BY SELECTIVE STRIKES, OVERTIME BANS AND GENERAL NON-COOPERATION. SIR KEITH JOSEPH, SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL SERVICES, DECLARED THE GOVERNMENT WAS " NOT GOING TO GIVE WAY." A SPECIAL SETTLEMENT, HE SAID, WOULD " WRECK, THROUGH THE REPERCUSSIONS ON OTHER TRADE UNIONS, THE PROSPECT OF BEATING INFLATION." HE URGED THE 220,000 WORKERS TO ACCEPT THE PHASE TWO OFFER OF AROUND 2 POUNDS WEEKLY AND TAKE THEIR CASE

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - PARAS SIX AND SEVEN

TO THE PAY BOARD WHICH WILL CONSIDER ANOMOLIES AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE THREE OF THE POLICY WHICH IS TO COME INTO FORCE LATER THIS YEAR. THE UNION IS DEMANDING 4 POUNDS WEEKLY.

5. PUBLIC SERVANTS, TEACHERS - CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE BEEN CONDUCTING SELECTIVE STRIKES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WITH THE CUSTOMS AND EXCISE SERVICES BEING HIT HARDEST. NEXT WEEK THEY ARE PLANNING TO STRIKE

SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICES WHICH COULD PRODUCE CONSIDERABLE HARDSHIP FOR PENSIONERS AND THE UNEMPLOYED. THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS HAS CALLED A ONE- DAY STRIKE FOR MARCH 21 IN ITS EFFORTS TO GET THE GOVERNMENT TO TREAT THE TEACHERS' LONDON PAY ALLOWANCE AS A SPECIAL CASE OUTSIDE OF THE PHASE TWO FORMULA. SOME 3,000 SCHOOLS WILL BE AFFECTED.

6. MINERS - THE GOVERNMENT FACES POSSIBLY THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT YET TO ITS COUNTER- INFLATION POLICY IN THE MINERS' DISPUTE. THE MINERS (NUM) REJECTED THE LATEST COAL BOARD PACKAGE OFFER ON PAY AND PENSIONS AND DECIDED TO BALLOT MEMBERS ON NATIONAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STRIKE ACTION. THE RESULT SHOULD BE KNOWN BY MARCH 31. A 55 PERCENT MAJORITY IS NECESSARY TO GIVE NUM AUTHORITY FOR NATIONAL STRIKE ACTION. THE MINERS, WHO ARE DEMANDING AROUND 7 POUNDS WEEKLY, REJECTED THE COAL BOARD OFFER OF 2 POUNDS 29 P, PENSION CONCESSIONS AND OTHER FRINGE BENEFITS.

7. FEATHER' S WARNING - TUC GENSEC VICTOR FEATHER WARNED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS HEADING FOR A " GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE" UNLESS IT CHANGES ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CURRENT WAGE DISPUTES. HE THOUGHT THE GOVERNMENT' S " APPARENT UNCONCERN" ABOUT THE CONTINUING DISPUTES DID IT NO CREDIT. " THE GOVERNMENT," HE SAID, " SHOULD BE TRYING TO FIND A COMMON SENSE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS."

8. TUC' S PROTEST STRIKE - THE TUC' S GENERAL COUNCIL HAS BEEN UNABLE TO AGREE ON THE TIMING AND NATURE OF ITS 24- HOUR PROTEST DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT' S ANTI- INFLATION PROGRAM. THE MARCH 5 SPECIAL CONGRESS DIRECTED THE GENERAL COUNCIL TO TAKE SUCH ACTION. AN AUEW (ENGINEERING UNION) GENERAL COUNCIL MEMBER, JOHN BOYD, TELLS US THAT AT THAT BODY' S MARCH 14 MEETING THERE WAS VERY LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR FOLLOWING THROUGH, APART FROM THE MINERS AND THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNIONS. BOYD PREDICTED THAT THE STRIKE CALL WHEN IT COMES WILL RECEIVE ONLY A " HALF- HEARTED" RESPONSE AND COULD BE A " BIG FLOP." HE SAID THAT THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS (EPTU), THE POST OFFICE UNION, AND NALGO (MUNICIPAL WHITE COLLAR EMPLOYEES), ALL LARGE UNIONS, HAD INDICATED THEIR INTENTION NOT TO PARTICIPATE. BOYD IS A MODERATE.

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